

LABOR

Farmworkers move into citrus

By Sam Kushner

OXNARD, CALIF.

ALTHOUGH IT HAS RECEIVED little public notice, the United Farm Workers union has been making impressive gains here. Approximately one-third of this area's 13,000 agricultural workers are now represented by the UFW, and 15 companies are under contract with the union.

It all began at the end of March when more than a thousand citrus workers, employed in what is probably the largest series of citrus groves in California, walked off the job at ranches affiliated with the Coastal Growers Association. Interestingly, the UFW was not actively organizing at any of these ranches at the time. Some of the workers were union members, however, having signed up at other locations where they worked under union contract.

"The workers struck on wages, conditions, food—just about everything," said Roberto de la Cruz, UFW director for Ventura County. "It was definitely worker organized. They organized themselves and came to the union and said they were ready to have an election. We went over to the camp and by God they were really organized."

Under a unique provision of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, striking workers can demand and get a representation election with 48 hours if it is shown that at least 51 percent of the employees have struck. The strike at the Coastal Growers groves was solid and there was no difficulty in making such a showing.

On March 31 the Coastal Growers workers cast their ballots and overwhelmingly chose the UFW, 897-42.

The election, the largest one so far involving striking workers, "sparked a new drive" among farm workers, says de la Cruz. Workers at the nearby Casitas Farms decided to go the same route. They struck and demanded an election, which the UFW also won, 64-1.

The Coastal Growers workers, however, were soon back on strike. After the election, workers returned to work, but then negotiations reached an impasse; the company wanted to meet only once a week on the new contract. A slowdown was organized, whereupon the company laid off all the workers. UFW workers from other

areas have come to Oxnard to demonstrate their support for the workers, and the union has been providing some assistance to the striking families.

The union won a third victory in citrus when workers at the Limoniera Company groves in nearby Santa Paula voted 191-83 for UFW representation.

In late April the UFW turned its attention to the unorganized strawberry fields, winning an impressive first victory at the Sea Breeze Berry Farms by a four-to-one margin.

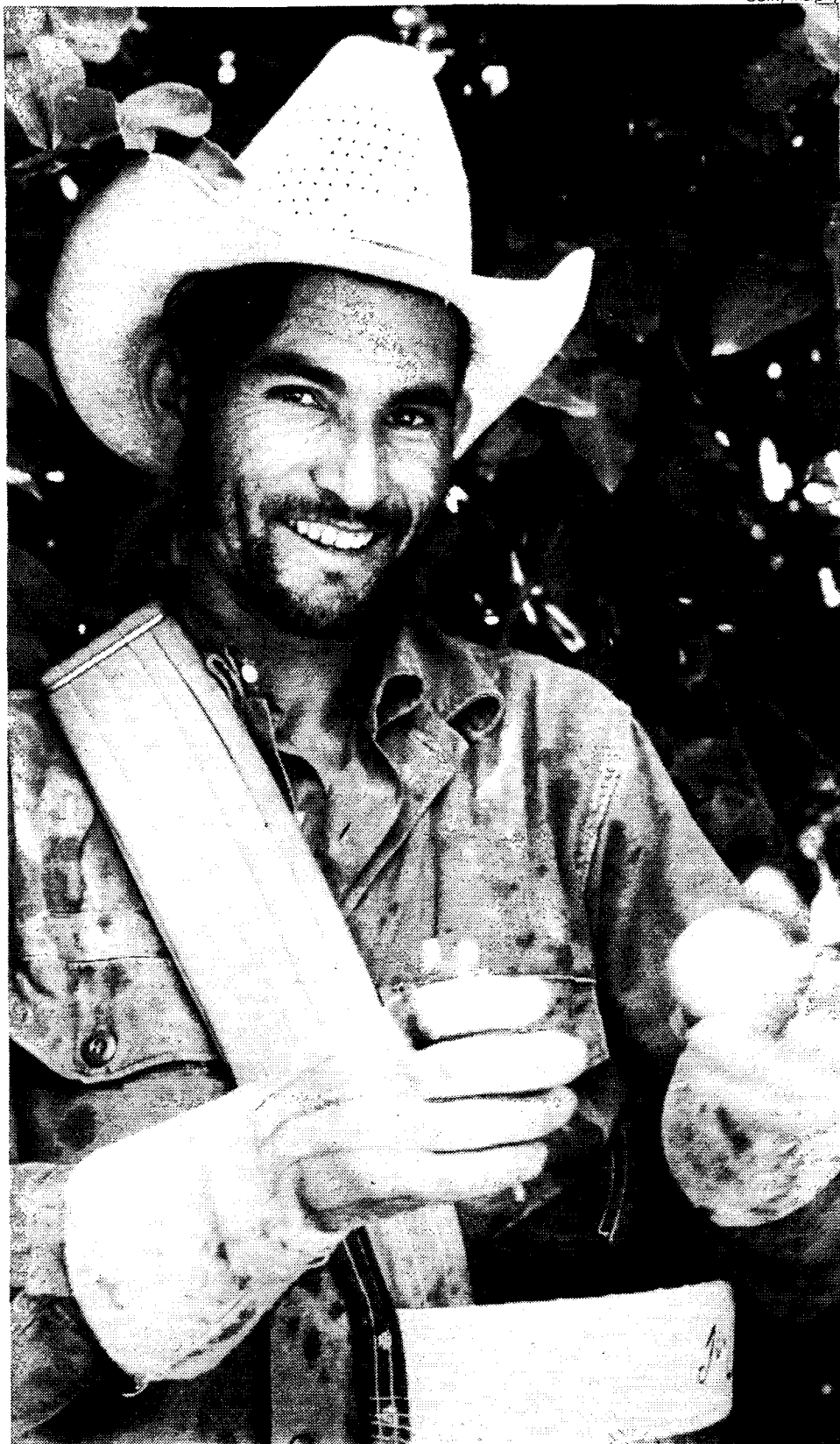
One of the most satisfying of the recent victories here came at the Egg City ranch, the site of an intense UFW-Teamster confrontation in 1975. At that time a representation election was held—while UFW members were on strike—that gave the Teamsters the right to represent the Egg City workers. The California ALRB, however, ruled that striking UFW workers had been illegally deprived of their right to vote. When 161 contested ballots were counted on April 18, the UFW emerged with a majority of all votes cast in both elections, 245-202. (Collecting the contested ballots was a herculean task in itself. Eighteen of the workers who had been denied their vote, for instance, were living in southern Mexico and had to travel 32 hours by bus to cast their ballots.)

Eliseo Medina, UFW vice president scheduled to become the union's director of organization, says, "It's pretty clear that the workers are asking for representation. They've gone for many years without representation when the union has been most active in grapes and vegetables. The people in citrus have been left behind in wages, benefits and protections. They wanted the protection of a union and they are willing to struggle as hard as it takes to get that."

Medina predicts that the UFW will meet its goal of 100,000 workers under contract in California by the end of the year. The union, he adds, is also preparing to move into other states in the near future.

On April 20 a panel of three federal judges made it easier for the UFW to organize in Arizona when they declared that state's farm labor law, passed in 1972 with the backing of the Farm Bureau, unconstitutional. That law barred strikes at harvest time and was clearly stacked in favor of the growers.

Sam Kushner is a reporter for WPKF in Los Angeles and the author of *Long Road to Delano*.



The UFW was not actively organizing in the Ventura County citrus groves. But the workers were and when they were ready they came to the union for their support and representation, sparking a wave of strikes and election victories.

ENERGY

Alternative technology center director fired

By Jim Robbins

BUTTE, MONT.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR Appropriate Technology (NCAT) proposed three years ago, was heralded as a landmark in federally funded programs. NCAT was to be an autonomous, decentralized organization that would fund alternative energy studies with an emphasis on low income people.

Arguments over the center's purpose, political power games and personality clashes have rendered the center all but ineffective, and finally resulted in the firing of director James F. Schimdt on April 21.

Alternative energy advocates initially had high hopes for NCAT, which was established on the theory that appropriate technology has the potential to solve many of the problems associated with non-fossil fuel energy.

NCAT's problems began with the Community Services Administration (CSA) and Montana Energy Research and Development Institute's (MERDI) failure to

be honest with the planning committee about under-the-table commitments, according to Tom Bender, a member of the planning committee.

"There existed an implicit agreement," he wrote, "to locate NCAT in Butte and pump a lot of money into its mined out economy, regardless of whether it would help or hinder an effective operation," he says.

According to Schimdt, one reason for his dismissal was his belief that NCAT should combine the technical, political and social aspects of alternative technology by stressing community involvement, decentralization of power sources and an energy system dependent upon local resources. NCAT was funding small scale alternative energy studies that would be designed according to the environmental specifics of a community.

One NCAT grant, for instance, went to the Passamaquidie Indians in Maine to fund a study of tidal power—the derivation of power from the change in the ocean's tides. Another NCAT grant went to a group of low income housing people in New York City known as the "11th Street Movement." This grant allowed

the group to retrofit their tenements with alternative power sources including solar heating.

On the other hand, Schimdt says, CSA sees the center's scope as much less broad, and does not want NCAT to get involved in the social aspects of alternative energy. The CSA would rather NCAT help implement CSA's weatherization and insulation program, he argues.

According to CSA spokesperson Mary Ann McKenzie, the board of directors fired Schimdt because of an "unresponsive grant process." "The board has heard a lot of criticism from local groups that the grant process is long and elaborate and is not responsive," she said. "And they question the efficacy of the worker management system that requires a vote from 50 persons for every decision."

Schimdt says that it is true the grant system is long and elaborate, but he blames it on the CSA, which controls the board of directors by a plurality of votes.

Dennis Holloway, a member of the board of directors who resigned and stalked out of the meeting when the vote to fire Schimdt passed, says that the primary reason that Schimdt was fired was a

personality clash between CSA head Dick Saul and Schimdt. "The CSA has been withholding funding from NCAT until Schimdt is fired because Dick Saul doesn't like Jim Schimdt," Holloway says. "It's as simple as that."

"Saul's the kind of person who's used to being in charge of things," said a NCAT employee, "and when Schimdt tried to take charge of NCAT and make it autonomous, Saul didn't like it. This is his effort to take control back."

NCAT's funding has been withheld by CSA since October. The center has survived on money left over from last year but has only enough funds to last until June 1st.

Although Schimdt believes that the future of the center is in doubt, interim director Hiram Shaw believes this isn't so. "We've received assurances from the board of directors," he said. "As soon as funding is restored, and we've received assurances that it will be restored by June 1, we will resume normal operations."

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By The Red Cent Collective

ECONOMICS

President's plan full of holes

Solutions to the nation's economic problems will require structural change. But Carter doesn't consider that an option.

THE 1977 ECONOMIC REPORT of the President has just hit the bookstands. While its attempted resurrection of the free enterprise system may be less spectacular than President Carter's sister Ruth's rebirth, its effects are sure to be wider reaching.

The report, which is put out annually by the President's Council of Economic Advisers, takes stock of our economy as we enter the third year of "expansion." The rhetoric is optimistic, but the substance of the report tells another story. In fact, Carter's real message is that we're in for economic stagnation unless we sweeten the economic climate for business. Worse still, the data in the report suggest a deepening structural impasse. Carter and the business community may have just about run out of sweeteners.

By some standards 1977 was a good year. The total amount of goods and services, our Gross National Product, grew by almost 5 percent above and beyond a persistent 6 percent inflation rate. Corporate profits after taxes grew even faster. And four million new jobs were created, an all-time record.

Yet the healthy performance of 1977 has left us with a "recovery" that doesn't seem much like one. The official unemployment rate was 7 percent for 1977. That's an annual rate higher than at any time during the '50s and '60s. Whole sections of the population have been bypassed in this "upswing," particularly blacks and other minorities.

The official unemployment rate for blacks is twice that for whites. And conceding that the official rates are misleading, the report notes that "the true nature of black teenage unemployment might approach 57 percent instead of the reported 39 percent."

Equally uninspiring have been recent trends in the rate of productivity growth, a measure of output per person-hour. Productivity is an indicator of economic growth and the key to the ability to compete in world markets. Over the past decade productivity has grown at a sluggish rate of 1.7 percent, or barely half of its average level in the two previous decades.

Partly in response to this lagging productivity, American exports declined in

real value while imports expanded. The result: an unprecedented \$31 billion balance of trade deficit and a drastic decline in the value of the dollar on world money markets.

Recent signs have not been encouraging either. The first three months of 1978 witnessed the first quarterly decline in real GNP in three years. The Council of Economic Advisers' March publication of their "Index of Leading Indicators," a barometer of economic health, showed its sharpest drop in three years. April's indicators are no more optimistic. Price increases in the first three months of 1978 indicate a dramatic increase in the rate of inflation. The balance of trade deficit has taken off at an annual rate surpassing even last year's record levels.

Investment problem.

A major factor in these problems, according to the report, is the "singularly disappointing" performance of business investment. Investment levels reached in 1973 are still unmatched. And projections of the growth of investment for 1978, taking account of inflation, range from only 5 to 7 percent. Even if these projections prove to be accurate, they are below historical precedents and the Council expects a "widening gap."

The worry about investments stems from its key role in economic growth. Investment promotes productivity increases, which means more output with the same amount of input. The construction of plants and equipment creates jobs. That

means more paychecks, which means more demand for consumer goods and services, which means even more jobs.

But investment depends on profits. If capitalists do not anticipate profits, they will not invest.

Carter's primary strategy for stimulating business investment is a series of tax cuts, totalling \$28 billion. \$20 billion of this will go to individual taxpayers, which will approximately offset the increase in social security taxes. The remaining \$8 billion will go to business. (In comparison to the respective incomes of individual taxpayers and business, business gets a tax cut five times larger than that for individual taxpayers.)

But this strategy is not likely to increase investment. A lack of funds is not the problem. Corporations are rolling in dough—with \$60 billion in excess cash reserves in the 400 largest corporations. Since 1974 the growth rate of corporate profits has been three times that of actual investment. And after tax profits, including the interest paid to banks, was a larger share of total income in 1977 than in the booming '60s.

But business remains firm. "We're not going to spend our money on a new plant just because we're embarrassed about how much cash we have," said one corporate officer. "That wouldn't be prudent."

B. Charles Ames, president of Reliance Electric Co., a capital equipment firm, says, "Before business takes on new programs, they'll have to develop some confidence." The President's report echoes

this theme, citing a "residue of unease and caution." In other words, the major corporations are waiting for a business climate in which their long-run profitability is assured.

Inflation and doubt.

The common corporate complaint is inflation and the failure of wages to fall adequately in this recession. Domestic inflationary problems are made worse by international monetary instability—the decline of the dollar and the general chaos of international money markets.

Increases in the price of energy have also reduced investment, by making capital intensive spending more expensive relative to labor intensive spending. Companies may be holding back until the make-up and price of our energy supplies are more certain. Business also says government regulation on environmental protection and health and safety issues are inhibiting profitability.

Solutions to these problems will have to involve government restructuring of the economy. The tried and true methods of fiscal and monetary management no longer work. Recent government "pump priming" has been largely ineffectual. Government spending in excess of taxation has increased dramatically in the past three years to an average of \$40 billion a year. As a percentage of GNP, government deficits have increased 50 percent over the levels that promoted the more successful recovery of the late 1950s.

But the President's report offers little to solve the nation's economic problems. Its voluntary wage and price controls are unlikely to work. Informal diplomatic pressure on other countries to buy more of our goods (and to sell us less) has an equally poor track record. Carter's energy program is stymied, with no alternative in sight. And while his promise to reduce the "excessive scope of regulation" may be impressive to business, it cannot eliminate popular pressure for environmental and health and safety reforms.

In spite of its rosy predictions, the President's annual report provides little evidence that the government will be able to rejuvenate investment, and with it, the economy as a whole.

The Red Cent Collective is a group of socialist economists in Amherst, Mass.

HEALTH

Congress examines use of drugs in childbirth

By Chuck Fager

WASHINGTON

ALMOST FIVE YEARS AGO Suzanne Armstrong of Palo Alto, Calif., published an angry and eloquent book, *Immaculate Deception*, describing, and decrying, what she called the dehumanizing and dangerous effects of "The American Way of Birth" as practiced in most American hospitals. In the intervening years her protest has become a widespread movement of resistance and alternative building.

Last month, news of this resistance finally surfaced in the too-often barren halls of Congress. On Monday April 17, the Senate Health Subcommittee held a hearing to determine whether American obstetricians use too many drugs, too many machines and too frequent surgery on too many pregnant women. The trend of the discussion seemed to be toward a qualified "maybe so" judgment.

Among witnesses were U.S. Food and Drug commissioner Donald Kennedy and Doris Haire of the American Foundation for Maternal and Child Health. Commissioner Kennedy allowed that recent medical advances presented a "disturbing paradox. The very techniques and products that have helped improve prenatal care and decrease infant mortality have themselves raised new questions."

Excessive use of drugs during the delivery, he agreed, can "result in increased risk to the patient and distress to the fe-

tus. Beneficial techniques for monitoring fetal development—such as ultrasound—could, if misused, prove to be the agents of subtle, long-term pathological effects."

Haire was more definite in her opinions: "There is no doubt in my mind," she testified, "that at least a large percentage of learning-disabled and handicapped children result from obstetric practices which interfere with normal biochemical checks and balances provided by nature to assure the normal progression of labor and a good maternal and infant outcome."

Sen. Jacob Javits (R-NY), who had asked that the hearing be held, said he was impressed by the criticisms of people, like Haire, "calling for extensive reform in our approach to the management of normally progressing births." And the subcommittee chairman, Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, added that as far as the safety of techniques like ultrasound fetal monitoring was concerned, "the time to find out is before millions of children are exposed. Otherwise we are playing an unjustifiable game of Russian roulette with the health of our children."

Unfortunately, many tens of thousands of American babies have already been exposed. The subcommittee staff released the results of an informal nationwide survey of 65 hospitals, which showed that 55 of the 63 institutions used fetal monitoring equipment on more than half their maternity patients.

Most of these hospitals also had rates of cesarian surgical deliveries in excess



Witnesses testified that there was no doubt in their minds that many learning disabilities were due to obstetric procedures and the use of drugs in childbirth.

of the nationwide rate of 11.4 percent, a rate that has increased dramatically in the past decade. One hospital in Alexandria, Va., had a caesarian rate of 42.5 percent. That compares with the caesarian rate in countries like Holland—where most births are at home or only minimally medicated, of 2 percent.

What legislative impact this brief hearing might ultimately have is unclear. It

could be the beginning of a long and difficult effort to change the "American Way of Birth" by federal action, or it could mean nothing at all. In any event, the session provides an object lesson in the importance of Washington in changing American society: Our national "leaders" in Congress will have to hustle hard to catch up with changes that are already well underway.